

The first step towards teaching creative thinking is establishing an environment that encourages students to question their own assumptions and beliefs. This allows imagination to take on a larger role where questions lead to experimentation. I came to teaching art having the background of a liberal arts education in Anthropology/Sociology that emphasized the multiplicity of understanding and the questioning of cultural constructs. This principle combined with diligence, collaboration, critical analysis and an exposure to diverse art practices is the foundation on which I build my teaching practice.

I want to create a classroom that engages students in the technical skills of art making and a knowledge of materials, while also establishing an open atmosphere of self-expression. In studio classes, I lead a project focused on developing technical skills followed with projects that are conceptually rooted in the student's own life experience and imagination. I use class time to sit down individually with students to talk about their ideas focusing less on answers in order to create a climate of inquiry and experimentation. I want to work with students to search for creative solutions, to think out ideas and to discover different technical, material or conceptual ways to achieve the same goal. In foundations classes, we move through an array of materials and techniques while learning the language of design. I instill the importance of developing a disciplined studio practice by assigning an independent semester-long project. Each class also has a collaborative project centered on a social issue that develops communication and relationships between students and also provides exposure to using art as a tool for social change.

Critiques that alternate between student-led presentations and prompted discussions are a way I build connections and understanding while exposing students to different perspectives. Students learn the language of visual and critical analysis as well as how to respond to various interpretations. Through images, readings, specific projects and discussion, I emphasize the overlapping, multicultural, and interdisciplinary histories of visual knowledge and the students' role within this history. Exposing students to historical and contemporary art through visits from current practicing artists plus outside visits to museums, gallery shows, lectures and artist studios gives context to their work within a community. For beginning arts majors, encouraging opportunities to connect to the larger world of art through proposing and exhibiting shows, curating, starting clubs or activities or volunteering is vital to understand how to make a future in the arts. For advanced art majors, learning professional development skills as well as developing their own singular voice and direction is important. This includes learning skills like writing exhibition proposals and grants, maintaining an accessible archive of images and writing, finding resources for residency, exhibition and employment opportunities, and generally creating a positive personal future where continued art making is possible.

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Finally, I believe learning is a collective and ongoing experience. My engagement with students sets an example of how they will engage with each other. The classroom should be a collaborative space where all can speak, experiment and brainstorm built on a structure of clear expectations, where work is demanding and diligence is important. I strive to teach with openness and kindness being supportive and reliable. This, in turn, is what I expect of students. If they develop these same attributes with each other early on, then a collective solidarity in the classroom can develop. The students support and challenge each other and begin to see the classroom as a place where they want to achieve. Acknowledging that we are a team and the work we do is collaborative, whether it is how the class maintains the classroom or how we critique, gives everyone a share in responsibility. A connected, engaged class does more to create a rigorous atmosphere of learning than anything I could do individually. Some students may never go on to pursue an art career yet the exposure to critical thinking through art, the experience of using the hand and different technologies to create, and the freedom of self expression can lay the groundwork for future confidence and success. I intend for this experience to build a base for expression and prompt an ongoing exploration of thought that can lead to a fresh way to engage with the world.